9: Stadling--90 E-3 (1898) 1901 Yakut
116, 234, 426, 466, 511

"The Yakut cattle are very small and of inferior quality. The cows give very little milk; a family of ordinary size needs for its subsistence from 10 to 15 head of cattle, of which 7 to 9 are milch cows. The great majority of Yakut families, however, have not so many, and want and famine are very common among them. As a rule they are deeply in debt to a few wealthy individuals, mostly of their own people, who keep them in a state of slavery, and being thus compelled to work most of their time for them, they are unable during the short summer to provide for their own wants. Their principal work consists in gathering hay on the meadows and marshes."

53: Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

with the toyons, particularly in the Olekminskiy Okrug, close to the ulusy associated with the Lena gold mines and those lying near the town of Yakutsk. The toyons sold butter, meat, hay and other agricultural products at these markets. 443

Commercial relations then began to develop within the actual Yakut ulusy. Forged objects had long been manufactured for purposes of sale, and there were cases in which wooden, bone and other articles were made to order. Products from cattle-breeding, hay, firewood and building materials were also often sold and bought; the products of hunting—furs—were almost universally sold. Nevertheless, the overall structure of the Yakut economy was still a subsistence one.

The division of labor within the family was traditional. Male and female occupations were sharply divided. Men and women looked after the stock but the former preferred to deal with horses (and even milk the mares), while women chiefly tended cattle. Everyone took part in the haymaking, but the mowing itself was a male occupation. Hunting and fishing were reserved for men. Woodworking, metalworking, and mammoth-ivory carving were male occupations, while the dressing of hide and fur, sewing clothes and footwear, making leather and clay vessels were reserved for women. Finally, it was the males who cut the timber and built the dwellings, while the women carried water, lit the fires and cooked the food. Hired workers, dependent poorer kinsmen, and, in ancient times, slaves in many cases performed both male and female tasks. 462 [466]

Means of Transportation

The ancient Yakut means of transportation were adapted to the barely passable taiga. Before the advent of the Russians, the Yakuts did not know of the wheeled carriage, and until very recently people in the more out of the way places had never seen wheels. Sledges and sledge harnesses were known; in the central regions the Yakut sledges were almost identical in shape to the Russian ones, but in the north they were straight-sided reindeer sledges. 493

In the old days, the Yakuts had their own particular type of sledge (silis syarga); the runners were not bent, but made of a piece of wood with a rootstock and had a slight natural curve. Yakut sledges are mentioned in 17th-century documents as a means of transportation. The most primitive form of harnessing was a strap attached to the saddle of a horse. In other cases shafts were used in the same way as the strap. Oxen were more often harnessed to sledges than horses. The ox was harnessed to shafts with a yoke; the Yakut yoke (*бурга.ідьы*, or *буулаға* and *сүүрдэр*) is made in two pieces, very different from the Russian or Ukrainian ox-yoke, and like the sledge was evidently indigenous in origin. The Yakuts travelled on the sledges, and sometimes still do, both in winter and summer. 492

A more typical means of transportation was the horse (used both for riding and carrying packs). The Yakut packsaddle, the base of which was two wooden boards secured together at an angle, is similar in shape to the type used by the South Siberian pastoralists. The same thing can more or less be said of the riding saddle, except that in the case of the Yakuts it is higher, broader and thicker. The saddle frame was usually made of wood; the high, wide saddlebow was usually reinforced at the front with a stamped silver plate with a forged hook in the center for the reins; the low back was also encased in silver. Silver ornaments, incidentally, are characteristic of a later period and the older saddles (from excavations) are not adorned with this metal. The saddle frame was covered with a [581]

53; Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

developed class relationships and certain very archaic survivals of ancient times. By the time the Russians arrived in the first half of the 17th century, the Yakuts had divided up into independent tribes. The largest and strongest of these were the Kangalastsy and Namа on the left bank of the Lena, and the Megins, Borogons, Betuns and Baturustsy between the Lena and the Amga; these very large tribes (to judge by the Russian tribute registers) numbered from 2000 to 5000 persons each. The smaller tribal groupings, some of which were independent and some of which belonged to those mentioned above, were reckoned in dozens. In the Russian sources these tribes are called "volosts," but the Yakut name for them was evidently d'on or aymakh. These tribes often warred with one another, and sometimes banded together temporarily for joint operations. All members of one tribe were considered fellow clansmen, which, among other things, was indicated by the fact that the "volosts" were exogamic groups. In turn, the tribes divided into smaller clan groups. The bond between fellow clansmen showed up in the custom of mutual assistance and vendetta, which, incidentally, was often replaced by blood money.

At this period, however, the clan-tribal structure was already in a state of decomposition. The tribes and clans were headed by the military aristocracy—the toyons. These possessed large herds of cattle and employed the labor of slaves and dependent fellow clansmen on their farms; they were also the military leaders. Heading detachments of armed servants and junior fellow clansmen, the toyons raided each other's territory, and frequently looted the farms of the free members of the community, seizing their cattle and destroying their economic independence. These toyon wars and raids were one of the factors which speeded up the decomposition of the clan commune. The ruined members of the commune were reduced to the status of "balyksyts" (poor people without cattle, or fishermen), or else became the indentured slaves of the toyons. Most of the slaves (kuluts or bokans) originated in this way.

The system of slavery among the Yakuts was fairly peculiar in form, containing certain patriarchal elements. The number of slaves was small; even the richer toyons had no more than 15 or 20, and much more frequently there were one to three slaves for each master. The slave usually had his own family and often lived in a separate yurt. Slavery was hereditary. Some of the slaves—the adult males—were part of the armed band of the toyon. On the other hand, cases were known in which the slaves led a hard life and their masters treated them cruelly, and we also know of the manifestation, although embryonic, of class feeling against exploitation (flight by groups of slaves and so on).

The problem of whether or not there was feudalism among the Yakuts before the Russians arrived still remains unsolved in Soviet historical-ethnographic literature.

Some writers (S. V. Bakhrushin and O. V. Ionova) think that early feudal relations among the Yakuts began to form in the pre-Russian period; they consider the presence of groups of semidependent people "living close to" the toyons, as well as the custom of lending cattle for grazing (the later khahaas), to be signs of this. Tokarev considers that a feudal-type relationship only began to form among the Yakuts after they had been annexed to Russia.

As regards land ownership, the older communal-clan system was still in force just before the Russians arrived. The communal form of land use not only predominated in forest hunting grounds and pastures, but the fisheries and even the meadows were still by and large in common use. Nevertheless, the meadows and fisheries had already been taken over to

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

Furthermore, the toyons frequently enjoyed the right of possessing larger plots, sometimes through inheritance, cleared from the forest or formed at the site of a drained lake. The leasing of land was also common.

In the second half of the 19th century the custom of equalizing of the land each year in accordance with the yield of grass came into use. The harvest was evaluated by elected "deputies," and those whose harvest was poorer than it should have been in view of the plot had the right to an extra quota of hay, and vice versa. This was called bebierke (from the Russian word poverka [adjustment]). But in actual fact this custom did not reduce inequality, for the "deputies" always acted in favor of the more influential (toyon) section of the population, to which they themselves very often belonged.

Generally speaking, the toyons possessed a large proportion of the available land, and the best part, to boot. For example, in 1908 two-thirds of all the land in the First Ospotskiy Nasleg in the Dyupsyunskiy Ulus belonged to five toyon households. In the Suntarskiy Ulus the toyons, who made up only 7% of the total population, possessed approximately half the land. By 1917, 55% of all the usable land was possessed by the rich people. By owning land and livestock the toyons were in a position to exploit the needy masses of the population. The forms that the exploitation took were greatly varied; they included elements characteristic of capitalist relations and the older patriarchal-feudal forms, as well as hidden survivals of slavery. For example, it was the practice to hire laborers—khamnachyts—usually for a definite period, particularly for haymaking; they were hired to carry firewood, build yurts and so on. They were paid either in money or in kind; and the method used was usually the typical Yakut system of payment (remuneration in advance), which was called "to take a contract" from the toyon for this or that work. This system of contracting was very advantageous to the richer people, since they then had complete power over the laborers. In return for a paltry sum received in advance, the poor person was sometimes in the toyon's clutches for a long time to come.

The system of contracting was also applied in other cases; advances were paid by the toyons for the supply of a whole variety of products, ranging from butter and hay right down to wild duck eggs. This system was a form of extremely cruel exploitation. One observer (V. F. Troshchanskiy, an exiled member of Narodnaya Volya)[3] wrote outright that the "welfare of the population will not be improved as long as this system exists in its present form."

Another very common form of exploitation was the handing over of the milch cattle to the poor people by the toyons for their use and for feeding, the so-called system of khahaas. At an earlier stage (at the beginning of the 19th century) the livestock was taken over, usually for a year, from spring to spring, but at the end of the 19th century it was more common to take over the cattle for only the summer (the distribution of livestock for feeding during the winter—uostur—was a separate process). In return for use of the cow, the poor peasant had to pay the toyon, as was the custom, 30 pounds of melted butter and 12-15 poods of tar (frozen sour milk) in the autumn; sometimes this was replaced or supplemented by compulsory service for the benefit

[3] A revolutionary Narodnik organization.—Ed.

of the toyon. This custom was a very typical and often extremely cruel form of exploitation. The winter upkeep of the livestock was a still more burdensome, enslaving agreement; in return for a head of cattle, the toyon usually paid 1 ruble, 50 kopeks or 2 rubles for the whole winter, whereas in actual fact the upkeep cost at least 5 rubles, and so it was only the poor peasants driven by need who entered into such agreements.

A still more typical custom, the origin of which in ancient times was connected with mutual assistance between clan members, but which later became in fact one of the forms of exploitation, was kumalaanism. A kumalaan was a poor peasant, a disabled person, an orphan or sometimes all the members of an impoverished family, who were assigned by the whole community to live for a certain time with a rich man or wealthy kinsman who would maintain them. Officially, the adoption of a kumalaan was regarded as an act of charity, and a way of helping a kinsman in need. But in actual fact the custom concealed the cruelest exploitation of unpaid labor. In many cases it was a disguised form of slavery and lasted a long time.

Another form of disguised slavery was the sale of children, which flourished particularly in the Olekminskiy Okrug. Parents who had reached the stage of abysmal poverty were often forced to sell their children, and well-off Yakuts sometimes bought them (when they had no children of their own) in order to bring them up, but more often in order to have unpaid labor. Their treatment of them was usually barbaric; they were half-starved and forced to do exhausting work. The demand for children was so extensive that in the Olekminskiy Okrug there were professionals (old women) who traded in children as an occupation.

There were also various forms of commercial exploitation, some of which, again, were inherent in the Yakut conditions. One such form for Yakutiya was the activity of the so-called "city-men." These were people, mainly from distant regions, who constantly made trips to towns where they had business contacts and sold and bought commodities on behalf of their fellow villagers in return for a commission from the latter. The city-men, apart from the agreed fee, could always obtain extra profits by speculating on the difference in prices, obtaining credit, and so on. Little by little the city-man began to trade in imported goods in his own ulus and turned into a full-fledged merchant. This was one of the ways in which the new Yakut commercial bourgeoisie formed side by side with the semifeudal toyons.

By the end of the 19th century, the Yakut commercial bourgeoisie was already a strong force. The Yakut merchants not only exploited their own fellow townsmen, but also penetrated into the taiga, into the Evenk and Yukagir hunting camps, where they gave the hunters liquor and enslaved them in usurious debt. In the trading regions, in the outlying parts of Yakutiya, Yakut (and Russian) trade capital enslaved the people in the most merciless ways.

As a result of all this highly varied and extremely cruel exploitation, the position of the masses of the Yakut population was lamentable. The poor people sometimes went hungry the whole year around, even in the summer, during the peak season when the hard work of haymaking needed a sound diet. "The Yakut does not take much notice of the fact that his children are always half-starved," wrote V. F. Troshchanskiy, "both because this is the normal state of affairs for the majority of Yakut children, and also because he himself, his wife, his very old parents, his livestock, his dog and his cat are half-starved